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Chapter 6

The Quest for National Unity in Uyghur Popular Song: Barren Chickens, Stray dogs, Fake Immortals and Thieves

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Barren chickens, stray dogs, fake immortals and thieves

This chapter focuses on the Uyghurs, a Turkic Muslim group living under Chinese political hegemony in an area currently known as the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of Northwest China (or Chinese Central Asia).[1] The region is home to seventeen nationalities, including the Uyghur, Han, Qazaq, Qirghiz, Mongol, Russian, Manchu, Özbäk, Tatar, Daur, Hui, Xibo, Tajik, Dongxiang, Tibetan, Salar and Tuvan peoples. However, only the first three are present in significant numbers.[2] To date, the Uyghurs remain the largest of these groups, though the number of Han Chinese immigrants in the region is likely to surpass the number of Uyghurs in the near future. Uyghurs have viewed the Han presence as an unwelcome encroachment since Qing rulers began to encourage mass immigration to the region in 1821, and the desire for self-determination – and, for many, secession from the People's Republic – has been

greatly fuelled by socio-economic competition from Han immigrants in urban areas, and by the collapse of the USSR and subsequent formation of independent Muslim states adjacent to Xinjiang in 1991.

The concept of encouraging Uyghur national identity through cultural forms is not new in Xinjiang. In the 1920s, as the region groaned under the weight of heavy taxation levied by Chinese warlord governors , Yang Zengxin and Jin Shuren, Uyghur intellectuals had begun to employ elite culture (poetry and poetry recitation) as a means to disseminate political ideas and encourage Uyghur national identity. This 'poetry of resistance' has been explored elsewhere (Rudelson, 1997: 146-53). From the late 1980s and early 1990s, and parallel with the rapid strengthening of Uyghur national identity in response to particular domestic and international conditions, popular forms of culture such as popular song, jokes, story telling, and oral histories came to play an increasingly important role in the reproduction of that identity and the process of ethno-political mobilization.[3] In particular, the works of certain contemporary singers struck an emotional resonance with diverse sectors of the Uyghur populace, and began to transcend social divides of oasis origin, occupation, generation, political orientation, educational level and degree of religious observance. By focusing instead on the ethnic boundary between the Uyghurs and a monolithic Han 'Other', a boundary expressed daily in symbolic, spatial and social terms in urban Xinjiang in 1995-1996, these singers were able to blur intra-ethnic divides to a significant degree.[4] At the same time, the hierarchical older/younger sibling relationship inherent in government rhetoric surrounding Han-minority relations was re-cast as a relationship of colonizer to colonized.

Here, five songs released in 1995 by popular singer Ömärjan Alim are analysed as a means to explore the representation and reproduction of Uyghur

national identity constructed in relation to the Han Chinese, and the quest for Uyghur national unity. Exploring the singer's agency in group identity construction, I examine metaphorical representations of the 'colonizer' (the Han Chinese) and the 'collaborator' (those Uyghurs thought to place personal ambition above ethnic loyalty).[5] I show how these representations reflected popular perceptions held among disparate groups of Uyghurs across the region, forging a common sense of 'emotional unity', while reproducing relational configurations of Uyghur identity in the cities, and going some distance to create a broad-based Uyghur national identity with the capability to straddle both urban and rural communities. Conversely, it is suggested that by highlighting the perceived barrier to Uyghur national unity – a national character grounded in political passivity, self-interest and opportunism – representations of the Uyghur 'collaborator' may paradoxically foster negative self-identity and low self-esteem, this perhaps explaining why certain songs have avoided censorship by the Chinese government. Finally, I propose that in lamenting Uyghur national disunity, Ömärjan Alim (intentionally or not) assumes the role of 'illuminist,' providing a timely source of national enlightenment.[6]

Geographical origin and migration to the Turpan and Tarim basins, 840 A.D.

To understand the foundations of Uyghur/Han conflict today, it is necessary to contextualize the relative histories of the Uyghur and Han peoples in the region known as Xinjiang. The first mention of a people called the Uyghurs refers to a Turkic nomadic tribe living on the steppes of today's Mongolian Republic. During the Uyghur Empire (744-840), the Uyghurs ruled the steppes from Qarabalghasun, a permanent city 'crowded with markets and various trades' (V. Minorski, cited in Barfield, 1989: 157), and stored silk extorted from China in their fortified capital.

When in 840 A.D. the Uyghur Empire was destroyed by Qirghiz nomads, the steppe Uyghurs split into three separate groups that began migrations (Geng, 1984: 6-7; Haneda, 1978: 5). One group went west to the Bišbaliq region north of the Tianshan in present-day Xinjiang, crossed the mountains, and occupied the Turpan Basin where it established the Buddhist kingdom of Gaochang (850-1250), and expanded its influence to Qarašar[7] and Kucha. Subsequently, a number of Uyghurs continued on to Qäšqär on the southern edge of the Tarim basin and joined members of the Turkish Qarluq tribe, their former allies on the Mongolian steppe (Geng, 1984: 8). The Uyghurs of Gaochang gradually gave up the nomadic lifestyle amid the relatively advanced settled culture of the area and fused with the indigenous Indo-Europeans, becoming farmers in a class society, fond of music, excursions, and banquets (ibid: 6). They are believed to be the direct cultural ancestors of Uyghurs today.

Although Chinese merchants had long been present in the region, which has been wholly or partially incorporated into the Chinese empire at several stages during its history, numbers of settled Chinese were small prior to the Qing invasion in the 1800s, and Xinjiang (meaning 'New Dominion' or 'New Border') became a formal province of China only in 1884. In comparison, the Turkic Uyghurs had been settled in the region in large numbers for almost a millennium before Han Chinese began to officially migrate to Xinjiang in 1821. This provides ample justification for a large number of present-day Uyghurs in describing themselves as a stateless minority in their own homeland. Since coming under Chinese political hegemony, the various ethnic groups in Xinjiang have to greater or lesser degrees aspired to self-determination, and the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries saw a number of secessionist movements flourish, if only briefly.[8]

Uyghur national identity: A recent phenomenon

Notwithstanding the enduring attachment of the Uyghurs to the place they consider their homeland (see, for example, Gladney, 1990: 2-3), the concept of Uyghur national identity is a relatively new one.[9] Firstly, the ethnonym 'Uyghur' has suffered considerable discontinuity, having fallen into disuse in the 1500s as the last of the Buddhist Uyghurs in Turpan converted to Islam. Prior to the 1920s, the various Turkic Muslim groups dispersed across the region referred to themselves as *musulmanlar* [Muslims], suggesting an over-reaching Islamic identity, or employed the term *yärliklär* [locals] and used oasis-based ethnonyms such as *Ürümčilik, Kučaliq*, suggesting a series of atomized oasis identities (Saguchi, 1978: 62-63). The ethnonym 'Uyghur' was to reappear only in 1921, when emigrants from Xinjiang's Tarim Basin holding a conference on Turcology in Taškänt proposed that the name 'Uyghur' be used to designate all those previously known by oasis ethnonyms. The name was subsequently adopted by the Xinjiang provincial government in 1934, possibly at the suggestion of Soviet advisors who had recently completed the task of classifying their own minority groups (Gladney 1990: 4). Secondly, the independent regimes established in Xinjiang during the second half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century cannot accurately be described as Uyghur nationalist movements for two reasons. On the one hand, the rebellions were rarely instigated by the Uyghurs (who tended rather to join others' movements); on the other hand, the rebels in each case favoured variations on the name 'Eastern Turkestan' and described themselves as 'Islamic' or 'Turkish-Islamic', suggesting a unification of Turkic Muslim groups in the region (and, in the case of the secular East Turkestan Republic,

of Muslim and non-Muslim groups). This shows that Uyghurs at that time did not wholly conceive of themselves as a separate ethnic and political entity.

Since the early 90s, however, the Uyghurs' sense of national identity has greatly strengthened. This phenomenon has appeared partly as they define themselves more and more in relation to the perceived religio-cultural and socio-economic threat posed by a rapidly increasing Han immigrant population (particularly in urban areas), and partly in response to certain influential domestic and international events: the reintroduction of conciliatory minority policies by Deng Xiaoping in 1980, the 1989 pro-democracy movement in China, the collapse of Eastern European Marxist-Leninist parties in 1989, and, most significantly, the disintegration of the USSR and subsequent formation of the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1991. It was the latter that definitively planted the notion of an independent state in Uyghur minds. Following the establishment across the border of five independent Muslim republics (Qazaqstan, Özbäkistan, Qirghizstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan), the Uyghurs, the Tatars, and the Salars became the only Central Asian Muslims in Xinjiang without an independent nation named after their ethnic group.[10] The vision of the CIS republics has since greatly encouraged Uyghur national identity, leading to the coining in 1995 of an alternative name – Uyghuristan – for a future independent state, and leading increasing numbers of Uyghurs to express resistance to Han rule in a variety of sub-political ways.[11]

The 'new folk'

Along with negative oral stereotyping of the Han, which occurred on a daily basis in urban Xinjiang in the mid-1990s, popular song proved more effective in uniting growing numbers of Uyghurs against the Han 'Other' than the 'poetry of resistance'

of the 1920s and 1930s, than competing regional attempts by intellectuals to project a new national consciousness (normally in print form), and even than Islam.

For the purposes of this chapter, it will be useful first to outline a definition of the term 'popular music'. Grenier and Guilbault characterize the theoretical debates surrounding the definition of popular music as either quantitative (volume of sales and radio airplay); qualitative (focusing on the privileged relationships established through music); comparative (analyses of different genres); or political (the production and distribution of music by powerful institutions and the media) (1990: 390). Of these, the first definition fits our context to a point, but carries with it certain limitations. The Uyghur songs I analyse here might certainly be described as popular in the sense that they enjoyed huge sales, but, as Richard Middleton points out, sales figures are open to manipulation and distortion, and different musics sell at different rates over different time-spans (1990: 5-6). Further, none of these four definitions embraces the central notion of music becoming the vehicle for the expression of socio-political views. Kassabian's description of the three main orientations of the term 'popular' in popular music and cultural studies is more helpful (1999: 116-17). The first – popular-as-folk – suggests a home-made, unmediated, and often unpolished, local form of music-making. The second – popular-as-mass – invokes contemporary forms of mass-produced and consumed music. She goes on to argue, however, that it is the third orientation – popular-as-populist – that has come to dominate, particularly in British cultural studies since the 1960s. This approach focuses on ways in which artists and audiences express social and political positions through music production and consumption. Over time, discourses on the term 'popular' have come to embrace the notion that audiences consciously engage with their popular culture, rather than the Frankfurt School position that they are passive victims of a 'false consciousness'

imposed by music producers representative of dominant culture. In other words, the ways in which musical texts are used and interpreted are the 'ongoing product of people's attempt to represent their own experiences, and to speak in their own voices instead of hegemonic codes' (Manuel, 1993: 8). Music consumption thus constitutes 'a process of making meaning from, and contributing meaning to, popular culture' (Kassabian, 1999: 115).

The popular-as-populist model can be usefully applied to our context, with one modification to account for local, political conditions. Whereas artists in democratic societies can be openly subversive and indeed gain sub-cultural capital from open rebellion, artists representing dominated ethnic groups in China cannot so readily flaunt social and political aims perceived to challenge the hegemony of a repressive state. Far from openly acknowledging their agency, Uyghur singers remain deliberately enigmatic when questioned about meanings and motives behind lyrical and musical texts for fear of political reprisal. After all, the Chinese empire itself is no stranger to the cynical use of music in nation-building projects, and has since earliest times mobilized music popular among the people in its goal to bring under one roof a staggering array of regional and ethnic diversities.[12]

Artists are usually attached to state-sponsored, professional song-and-dance troupes [*gewutuan*], paradoxically better known for the co-optation and control by the state of traditional art forms and minority representation. Minority artists have been trained in these institutions since 1949, where they learn how to represent their ethnic identities in ways acceptable to the Chinese state (Baranovitch, 2001: 362-66). Correspondingly, the choice of works to be performed in official live or television performances is normally vetted by troupe leaders and by the local Cultural Bureau (*Wenhuaju*), responsible for monitoring the arts (Mackerras, 1985: 71-2). The latitude

for personal interpretation, melodic subtlety, and complex asymmetrical and syncopated rhythms traditionally enjoyed by the soloist or small Uyghur ensemble has been replaced in official troupes by a large folk orchestra of traditional and modernized instruments working from fixed music scores, leading to simplification, distortion and standardization. Lyrics contain messages of 'unity among nationalities' (that is, among the Han and China's fifty-five ethnic minority groups) and often promote government minority policies (Harris, 2004: Introduction).

Since the early 1990s, Uyghur nationalist messages have been conveyed through the medium of 'new folk,' one form of commercially lucrative popular music in Xinjiang.[13] New folk music differs greatly from that performed by troupes in both performance style and lyrical content. It consists mainly of solo recordings of contemporary compositions, and enjoys a certain expressive freedom afforded by the octave-based modal structure (usually either heptatonic or pentatonic) which allows for interesting subtleties of tonal colour; the unique rhythms – characterized by extensive use of asymmetry and syncopation – associated with the traditional folk singing style and traditional stringed instruments such as the *dutar* (or two-stringed lute) also mark this musical tradition out as radically different from the musics performed by the troupes. Moreover, its song lyrics address prevalent social and political issues, borrowing or adapting lines by well-known and less well-known poets and writers.

Like some other professional minority musicians in China, new folk singers Ömärjan Alim, Abdurehim Heyit, and Köräš Kösän began in the 1990s to try to subvert Beijing's control over the arts in the pursuit of alternative ethnic and national agendas.[14] In so doing, they attracted varying degrees of attention from the state censor, which has required artists and producers to submit new releases to the Cultural

Bureau for political checks since 1995. Alim, Heyit, and Kösän all had cassettes confiscated, and were often fined and/or forbidden to perform in public over the course of the decade.[15] When I met Abdurehim Heyit in the southern oasis town of Qäšqär in August 1996, he was having difficulties releasing his new cassette through Xinjiang-based producers who are subject to greater scrutiny by the censor than their counterparts elsewhere and was not permitted to tour.[16] Always careful to absolve himself of direct agency, he told me, smiling: 'They don't like my song words. *They say* I'm a nationalist!' [my emphasis]. As a professional singer attached to a song-and-dance troupe, Heyit would normally be required to appear regularly in official state-controlled performances. Yet he told me he declined to appear in performances on Uyghur television, explaining: 'I don't want to play the songs the producers ask me to play ... and they won't let me play the songs I want to play!'. Perhaps the most famous of banned songs from this period is Ömärjan Alim's 'Mehman Bašlidim' [I brought home a guest] from the cassette *Pärwayim Peläk* [Destiny is my concern]. The song employs an allegory in which the Han colonizer is depicted as 'the guest who never left' and the Uyghurs as slaves forced into the hostile desert.[17] However, censorship of popular music remained highly unsystematic, with some 'songs of nationalism' avoiding government attention.

Reproducing the nation

One key to the success of popular music in conveying nationalist ideas is that it carries messages to the Uyghurs in their preferred cultural form. De Vos lists aesthetic cultural forms such as food, dress, music, and song as one of a number of markers of cultural difference that might be selected by group members in the definition of their group identity (1975: 9). Song and dance have been integral to Uyghur culture since

ancient times and continue to be the mainstay and focal point of Uyghur social life, predominating at gatherings in the home, birthday parties, Uyghur dance restaurants, weddings, *mäšräp* [gatherings for feasting, story-telling, and music-making],[18] university dance halls, and the bazaar with its myriad cassette kiosks (Mackerras, 1985: 62-75; Smith, 1999: 231-33; Harris, 2002: 267-70). Significantly, a love of, and flair for, musical performance is also one criterion by which Uyghurs differentiate themselves from the Han whom they often dismiss as dull and introverted.[19]

The orality of popular song also means that it is accessible to Uyghurs from all backgrounds, whether rural or urban. Although the late Uyghur novelist, poet and historian, Abdurehim Ötkür, was an undisputed symbol of Uyghur nationalist aspirations in the 1980s and 1990s, his media – poetry and the historical novel – were circulated predominantly in urban, often intellectual, spaces.[20] The extent to which his works reached the rural population – with its higher instance of illiteracy – must surely have been limited. Furthermore, the fact that the Uyghur language has undergone repeated script changes during the period of Chinese Communist rule means that Ötkür's work – published in the Arabic script ('Old Script') – is inaccessible to a generation of Uyghurs educated in the Latin script ('New Script') between 1960 and 1982.[21] In contrast, song words are communicated orally and can be received and understood by all. This is evidently why new folk singers have begun to borrow the poetry of Ötkür and other nationalist writers and use it – or adapt it for use- in their song lyrics. By so doing, they can transmit nationalist sentiments originally expressed in written or print form far beyond urban, intellectual circles and straight into the heart of the countryside.[22]

Thirdly, popular song can be rapidly disseminated via Xinjiang's low-budget and (partially) independent cassette industry. As Peter Manuel has shown in his study

of mass-mediated cassette culture in North India, cassettes as one form of 'new media' are affordable, easy to produce, duplicate and pass on, and largely evasive of central control, making them the ideal vehicle for socio-political mobilization, even when banned by the censor (1993: 2-4; 238). In Xinjiang, cassettes are transported from their place of production to large towns in the north and south. Uyghur merchants then buy the cassettes from urban distributors and take them home for sale in smaller, rural bazaars. In all of these centres, further 'pirate' copies pass from hand to hand. Moreover, as in other parts of China, there is a growing trend of young Uyghur men coming to urban centres from the countryside to look for work. These migrant workers gradually become familiar with the popular discourse of 'us and them' – Uyghur vs. Han – which is stronger in the city than in rural areas due to more intensive penetration by Han settlers, and with 'nationalist' songs heard at the bazaar. When they return to the countryside, a copy of the cassette may accompany them (or perhaps the memorized song lyrics, in a process of oral transmission). The cassette is then played (or the song performed) in the rural home before an audience of relatives, neighbours and friends, and the images and ideas within are reproduced in rural settings. With the advent of this performative dimension, Tuohy argues, popular song becomes 'an active means by which to experience the nation' (2001: 109).

This brings us to the fourth reason. The specific musical (sonic) texts created in new folk – the unique qualities of the traditional singing voice (predominantly a head voice but also articulated by nasal inflections) and sounds of the *dutar* – make it enormously affective. The traditional Uyghur singing style features subtle tone shifts of the melodic line, free melismatic ornamentation, and, as with other Turkic musical traditions, a tendency to employ ululations (an inflection that draws on howls and/or cries to give the tone a 'lift'). With Alim's and Heyit's songs being sung almost

exclusively within a minor (and modally heptatonic) tonal structure, this voice sometimes evokes fragility and a sense of mourning, at other times quivering rage. It embodies a sense of mingled grief and frustration, which, combined with affective lyrical content, can give rise to very strong emotions. In this respect, Harris cites a Uyghur song composer as follows:

> A people who have suffered long oppression have soft hearts, they are easily shattered. There is much in their hearts that is unsaid. There is a special tragic note to their music. (2002: 273)

Forney, in an article for *Time* (2002), similarly points to the tragedy in Heyit's music, characterizing him as the 'man of constant sorrow'. The *dutar*, meanwhile, contributes to new folk's appeal in two important ways. Like the Serbian one-stringed *gusle*, it may be said to assume an atavistic role as its sound 'travels across the dark centuries' (Thomas, 1999: 172-3), linking Uyghurs with ancestors who played the same instrument, and thus embodying continuity with Uyghur tradition. More significant still is the retention of traditional strumming patterns.

Finally, unlike co-opted Uyghur artists Kelimu and Bahai'erguli, who sing in the Chinese language, thus becoming mouthpieces for China's all-inclusive national design ('singing collaborators'?), new folk singers sing in the Uyghur language. This ensures that messages reach rural Uyghurs who may know little or no Chinese, and carries significant symbolic value. The Chinese state has frequently used vocal music as a vehicle for the dissemination of national standard speech (Mandarin) in the hope that local, regional, and ethnic loyalties might be transformed into national (Chinese) ones (Tuohy, 2001: 117). Where minority languages have been retained in folk songs, the aim has been to represent the nation's ethnic diversity while simultaneously underscoring inter-ethnic harmony through the lyrics. At the same time, the state has

all but institutionalized the (Han) Chinese language in minority areas in the spheres of education and employment. By favouring the Uyghur language, Xinjiang's new folk singers not only reject the assumed superiority of the Han language but also construct an alternative national (Uyghur) voice. For these reasons, new folk became the ideal vehicle through which not only to reflect prevalent social and political concerns in Xinjiang in the mid-1990s but also to construct and reproduce an alternative social, political and national consciousness.[23]

Five songs by Ömärjan Alim

In the summer of 1996, one cassette in particular was blasted ceaselessly from cassette kiosks at bazaars in Ürümchi and oasis towns across Xinjiang. Wherever one went – Turpan, Kucha, Qäšqär, Xotän, Aqsu – Alim's voice rang out in private as well as public, rural as well as urban spaces, temporarily turning the cassette *Qaldi Iz* [Traces] into the Uyghur national soundtrack.[24] In an interview with Harris, a sound engineer involved in its recording attributes its extraordinary success to Alim's ability to communicate with the peasants:

> He has a solid audience, he crosses boundaries of city and country, intellectual and peasant… Ömärjan has caught the heart of the Uyghur peasants, that's 90% of the population. He is popular because his words are direct, easily understood. He uses peasant language, proverbs. (2002: 278)

But plain language was clearly not the sole source of the cassette's popularity. Its overwhelming success derived also from its lyrical meanings. When asked what they liked about Ömärjan Alim's songs, the vast majority of respondents indicated the song-words, which they described as 'heavy with meaning' [mänisi čong], and which evidently articulated their situation *as they perceived it*. Including the gentle title track,

‘Qaldi Iz’ [Traces], which draws on a poem and novel by the late nationalist writer Abdurehim Ötkür, almost every song invites reflection on common grievances and is conceived within an implicitly or explicitly assumed framework of opposition to the Han.[25] For instance, ‘Bulğanğan Sular’ [Dirtied waters], laments the environmental pollution believed by many Uyghurs to result from (Han) economic development of the region;[26] ‘Aldanma, Singlim’ [Don’t be taken in, sister] is a didactic piece warning young Uyghur women not to mar their youth by frequenting discos and becoming a plaything for (often Han) men;[27] ‘Tuğmas Toxu’ [Barren chickens] is a blackly humorous critique of Han colonization of the land and enforced birth control policy; in ‘Bäzilär’ [Some people], and ‘Äwliya Dostum’ [My immortal friend], Alim explores the thorny subject of the Uyghur puppet official (or ‘collaborator’); ‘Ränjimäyli Özgidin’ [Let’s not blame others] and ‘Häsrät’ [Sadness] deal with perceived flaws in the Uyghur national character i.e. the tendency towards political passivity, infighting, and collaboration with the (Han) oppressor; and, finally, in ‘Därwaziwän’ [The gatekeeper], Alim is characterized as the ‘illuminist,’ keeping lonely watch over the fate of the Uyghur nation, determined to enlighten his people and steer them from repeating the mistakes of the past. Below, I analyse lyrical meanings in four of these songs – ‘Tuğmas Toxu’, ‘Bäzilär’, ‘Äwliya Dostum’ and ‘Häsrät’ – to show how social and political concerns prevalent among Uyghurs during this period of acute Uyghur/Han ethnic dichotomization were reflected and reproduced (in some cases with violent consequences) through the medium of popular song. Song analyses are supported by interview data gathered during a year of ethnographic fieldwork carried out in Xinjiang between 1995-1996, and during a 6-week field trip to Ürümchi in 2002.[28]

The Han colonizer

‘Tuğmas Toxu’	**‘Barren chickens’**[29]
{Tuğmas toxu yatidu	Barren chickens sit
Uwuluqni igälläp} (x2)	And occupy the roost
{Yürär särsan kočida	While they who’d lay twice as many eggs
Tuxum tuğqan hässiläp} (x2)	Roam the streets
Tuğmas toxu katäktä	Barren chickens sit in the coop
Tallap esil dan yäydu	And eat the choice grain
{Tuğmaydu ya katäkni	They lay no eggs yet won’t give up
Tuğqanlarğa bärmäydu} (x2)	The coop to those who laid
Oylap qaldim turmušta	I fell to thinking that in this Life
Barğu šundaq adämlär	Such individuals exist
Xuddi tuğmas toxudäk	Who, like barren chickens
Älni bizar ätkänlär	Invite the people’s hatred
Yašisimu undaqlar	And though they live among us
Älgä bärmäs qilčä näp	Bring no benefit to the people
Xuddi tuğmas toxudäk	But like barren chickens
Ötär orun igälläp	Occupy the best position
Yašisimu undaqlar	Though they live among us
Älgä bärmäs qilčä näp	Bring no benefit to the people
{Xuddi tuğmas toxudäk	But like barren chickens

Ötär orun igälläp.} (x2) Occupy the best position.

The ‘barren chickens’ in ‘Tuğmas Toxu’ can be understood in at least three ways. According to one interpretation, they are the Han Chinese, depicted as the colonizer occupying the ‘roost’ or the beautiful land of Xinjiang. This colonizer, while adopting a birth control policy designed to control its own numbers, has imposed a slightly modified version of that policy on minority nationalities throughout China. For many Muslim Uyghurs – particularly those in rural areas and the deeply religious south – the concept of choosing not to bear children is preposterous and therefore humorous (another reason for the song’s appeal). More significantly, the policy makes it practically impossible for the Uyghur population to stay abreast with the rapidly increasing Han immigrant population. Prior to the policy’s introduction, many Uyghurs raised families of between 8-14 children, considering childbirth to be a blessing from *Xuda* [Allah], and the suggestion is that, had they been allowed to continue, Uyghurs could have fully occupied the land instead of being ousted from it by the Han (‘they who’d lay twice as many eggs roam the streets’). Uyghur attachment to, and rightful ownership of, the land was often forcefully communicated by Uyghur respondents. Uyghur intellectuals, Šöhrat and Räwiä, maintained on separate occasions that Han Chinese have created a myth of origin regarding their history in Xinjiang and even that they stage archaeological tricks in order to ‘prove’ their presence in the region for hundreds of years. Less educated Uyghurs made equally indignant reference to this perceived re-writing of history, as when Batur, a migrant worker in Ürümchi, exclaimed: ‘They [the Hans] say they were here first. They even say it in the books they write. They say they have always been here!’ (Smith, 1999: 259-61). [30]

Based on a different reading, the ‘barren chickens’ are the Uyghur leaders, who make no attempt to gain rights and privileges for the Uyghur people, yet continue to eat finer foods (choice grain) and live in better houses (roost, coop) than those thought to have done more for the nationalist cause. This view of ethnic Uyghur officials as collaborators is not new. We know that, already under the late Qing indigenous officials in Xinjiang retained from among local nobles conspired with Qing officials in the oppression of their fellow Uyghurs, although the Qing emperor forbade it. Along with Qing officials, they became popularly known as ‘dogs with human faces’ (Kim, 1986: 46). In 1995-1996, amid an atmosphere of increased desire for self-determination, the Uyghur general public was once more extremely disillusioned with its indigenous representatives. Räwiä was one urban dweller who despaired that Uyghur leaders did not stand up to central government: ‘Our leaders say nothing. I don’t know if they don’t care or if they are just too scared. *I* would speak up about things if I were a cadre’ [respondent’s emphasis]. On another occasion, she argued that Uyghur leaders were ‘in no danger of execution’, and demanded to know why they went along with adverse policies proposed by Han officials. Similar views existed among rural Uyghurs, though usually aimed at local, lower-level officials. Tursun, a peasant in his thirties from Aqsu, remarked ironically that much of the tax he paid made up wages for Uyghur cadres and labelled them parasites. This popular view is also reflected in ‘Tuğmas Toxu’, especially if we read the ‘barren chickens’ as a representation of the Uyghur leaders who enjoy many privileges while giving nothing back to their people.

A third interpretation casts white-collar Han immigrants as the ‘barren chickens,’ reflecting the widespread Uyghur concern that Uyghurs are marginalized by default in the urban job market where Han-run state organs and private enterprises

hire only fluent Chinese speakers.[31] Many Uyghurs complain that Han Chinese get jobs purely on the basis that their mother tongue is Chinese even though they may lack the necessary abilities. In this way, they potentially rob a more qualified Uyghur of the post. Šöhrat explained how Han academics in Xinjiang were always assigned the best research projects simply because they were proficient in written Chinese. In fact, he argued, Uyghur researchers had just as much research potential – sometimes more – but were denied the same opportunities due to their lower level of Chinese proficiency.

With such a wide range of possible interpretations, it becomes difficult to identify who the 'barren chickens' – or those they represent – actually are, and this of course is one reason why new folk singers can sometimes avoid detection by the government censor. Even without the use of metaphor, it has been hard for the Chinese state to know how to interpret song lyrics. Tuohy notes, for instance, that state leaders in the 1980s and 1990s were unable to reach agreement on whether rock singer Cui Jian's lyrics about the Chinese Communist Party's revolutionary heritage were patriotic or ironic (2001: 118). It can take some time for the authorities in Xinjiang to realize that a set of lyrics is politically problematic, partly due to the wide use of metaphor, allegory and allusion, and partly because songs are sung in the Uyghur language, indecipherable to all but a few Han Chinese. However, interview data suggest that the Cultural Bureau often does come to learn of political subterfuge, ironically through tip-offs by Uyghur 'collaborators' or spies. When a cassette is eventually banned, however, the censorship has the opposite effect to that intended: ordinary people suddenly become very interested in the product. In this respect, the Uyghurs might be said to resemble any other people in the world.[32] Harris writes that Uyghur music producers and distributors in Xinjiang have actually found ways to use

censorship to commercial advantage (2002: 279-80). When a new tape is about to be released, they post advertisements in shops urging customers to buy before the product is banned, thus stimulating public curiosity, boosting sales, and ensuring still wider dissemination of the nationalist ideas within. While lyrical meanings in new folk remain on the surface ambiguous, the people can – and do – read what they like into them, and those readings are invariably tempered by their perceptions of the social, political, and economic climate in which they live, that is, of their marginalized position in relation to Han immigrants and their continued oppression by the Chinese state.

The Uyghur 'collaborator'

The second song, 'Bäzilär' [Some people], articulates popular Uyghur perceptions of the weakness and passivity of indigenous officials (and would-be officials) and of their unscrupulous pursuit of personal gain:

'Bäzilär'	**'Some people'**
{Älgä ämäs ämälgä xomar ikän bäzilär	Some are addicted not to the people but to power
Näpisi üčün jenidin kečär ikän bäzilär} (x2)	And sacrifice their own for the sake of greed
{Öz bäxtini özgining jäbirisidin izdišip	They seek their happiness in others' misery
Wijdanini görägä qoyar ikän bäzilär} (x2)	And pawn their consciences
Äl čongini äzäldin ällä süyüp saylaytti	In ancient times the people elected their leaders
Lekin älning közini boyar ikän bäzilär (x2)	Now some pull wool over the

	people's eyes
{Aläm degän barčiğa täng selinğan dastixan	The world is a table spread for all
Lekin uni uyalmay bular ikän bäzilär} (x2)	Yet some steal all without scruples
Yalaq yalap ögängän xuddi lalma itlardäk	Like stray dogs who've learned to lick at the dog bowl
Mötiwärlär aldida turar ikän bäzilär (x2)	Some stand before the powerful
{Mäydisigä urğanning hämmisila är ämäs	They beat their chests, but none are men
Sesip qalğan yağačdäk sunar ikän bäzilär}(x2)	Just split like rotten wood
Sesip qalğan yağačdäk sunar ikän bäzilär.	Just split like rotten wood.

Respondents interpreted s*ome people* as referring to Uyghur officials, puppet leaders chosen not by Uyghurs but by the Chinese government, accused of ignoring the misery of their people while themselves enjoying privileges extended by the Han.[33] One is reminded of the popular concept of the 'man of the people,' summed up in the Uyghur proverb: 'A good man is in touch with the people; a bad man only with property' [Yaxši är älgä ortaq, yaman är malğa].[34] In addition to voicing keenly felt popular resentment, the song is apparently intended to prick the conscience of the officials themselves by accusing them of 'selling out' their ethnic group. Once again, it is worth noting that this perceived phenomenon of betraying the nation is not new. There are an unusually large number of words in the Uyghur language that express precisely this notion, for instance, *milliy xa'in* [ethnic or national traitor]; *milliy munapiq* [scum of the nation]; *wätän satquč* or *satqin* [person who 'sells' the nation]; *maqulči* [collaborator or 'Yes-man'].[35]

In the third verse, the metaphor of the dog, used during the Qing colonial period, re-surfaces in the modern context. Though dogs in the wild exist in hierarchically ordered packs, living and hunting together as a team, the stray dog, once separated from the pack, becomes an opportunist and takes his chances. The domestic dog, meanwhile, may be characterized as parasitic, betraying his own kind to accept favours and an easy life under a dominant race. Contrast this with the other metaphor often used by Uyghurs to describe their national character, namely, the 'sheep mentality'. Uyghurs often complain that they are too like the sheep that grace their dinner table (and joke that they should eat less mutton), the implication being that Uyghurs bow down too easily to leadership from without. This reflects their tendency throughout history to accept foreign hegemony, as well as their inability to produce a leader from among their ranks who was able to unite them. However, the sheep metaphor also suggests that Uyghurs tend to think and act as one, and this does not bear out current social realities. The 'stray dog' metaphor seems to reflect more accurately the perceived self-serving nature of the indigenous official, and can be linked to one of Alim's older themes: the idea that Uyghurs have been displaced from their homes by the Han 'boss' and forced into the hostile desert.[36] Once dispossessed, the temptation towards opportunism is too great, so that some of these exiled strays break away from the pack and sidle up to lick gratefully and obediently at the dog bowl proffered by the new master.[37]

In the final lines, Alim alludes to the perceived tendency of Uyghur officials to puff themselves up and make a big show of their status. 'Some people,' he sings, pretend to be real men on the outside while inside they are broken and corrupt. The rotting wood metaphor evokes at once the notion of Uyghur leaders having no conscience and the sense that they are of no practical use – a house cannot be built

with rotten wood. Again, we revisit the idea that a 'real man' is a man who thinks and acts for his people.

Social Climbers

The third song, 'Äwliya dostum' [My immortal friend], was interpreted by respondents as dealing with low and middle level officials who are perceived to collaborate in order to advance their social status:

'Äwliya dostum'	**'My immortal friend'**
{Äwliyadäk čağlaysän dostum özängni	You think yourself immortal, my friend
Bašqilarğa sanjisän näštär sözingni} (x2)	Stinging others with your words
{Maxtay desäm azapliq dilim köyidu	Should I think to praise you, my heart burns
Maxtimaymän zadila tilim köyidu} (x2)	I can't praise you for my tongue burns
Way, way, way, way… hiligär dostum (x2)	O, o, o, o … my sly friend
{Šir aldida tülkidäk qilisän süküt	Before the lion you fall silent as a fox
Ämma čüjä aldida bolisän bürküt} (x2)	Yet before the chick, you're an eagle
{Čiwin qonsa ğingšisän	You whine if a fly alights on you,
Kaltäk tägsä jim	But when struck by a stick say nothing
Šundaq xuydin bizlärni saqla Ilahim} (x2)	Allah, save us, from this character trait

Way, way, way, way … hiligär dostum (x2)	O, o, o, o … my sly friend
Way, way, way, way … äwliya dostum	O, o, o, o … my immortal friend
Way, way, way, way … älwida dostum	O, o, o, o … farewell my friend.
Älwida dostum.	Farewell my friend.

In the second verse, it is suggested that such individuals flaunt their status and act as though invincible before the 'chick' (the powerless Uyghur people) while, on the other hand, becoming servile before the 'lion' (the powerful Han and higher-ranking Uyghur leaders). The following lines 'You whine if a fly alights on you, but when struck by a stick say nothing' can be read in at least two ways. One interpretation is that petty officials complain and offer excuses if an ordinary, powerless Uyghur approaches them for help, yet are silent and complicit when pressurized from above, that is, by the Han or higher-ranking indigenous officials.[38] A second interpretation suggests that the 'stick' is a thick wad of money, implying that such officials do favours only for those compatriots who can afford to bribe them. One respondent explained the ironic use of the word 'immortal' with reference to the saying 'Asman egiz, yär qattiq' [The sky is high, the ground is hard]. In other words, those who over-reach themselves have further to fall and petty officials such as these will one day know that they are not immortal.

In interviews, Uyghur respondents frequently criticized individuals thought to be co-operating too closely with the Han authorities, for example, Uyghur officials, Uyghur police, and some religious personnel. Moreover, these criticisms often developed from the verbal level into direct action. According to Dilšat, who worked in tourism, a violent attack on an imam from the Idkah mosque in 1996 (one of his ears

was cut off, and his arms slashed with meat cleavers) was intended as a warning to other religious figures not to collude with the Han hegemony.[39] According to him, the imam had 'helped the government in many ways' and was 'much hated'. This view was supported by Karim, a health professional from southern Xotän, who stated: 'The imam's links with the authorities were rather too close'. The violence did not always stop with a warning. Since the summer of 1993, a small number of militant Uyghur nationalists had begun to make assassination attempts on low and middle level Uyghur party cadres and officials where previously they had only targeted Han Chinese cadres, public security officials, and military.[40] In 1995, a Hong Kong newspaper reported (slightly sensationally) that the Uyghur separatist movement was 'an organisation like the "Palestinian National Liberation Front", often conducting activities such as assassination with their spearhead pointed chiefly at local government officials, especially those in the public security departments'.[41]

Numbers of assassinations of Uyghur cadres, as well as attacks on Han police and soldiers, riots, and minor armed insurrections, increased significantly during the years 1995-1997. One particularly horrific incident in 1996, which went unreported in the Chinese press, involved a multiple assassination of a Uyghur cadre and three of his relatives in his home in Kucha (significantly, victims' tongues were cut out before their throats were slashed) and was the first occasion on which the Chinese authorities encountered Uyghur suicide bombers (Smith, 1997). This background, then, provides the context for the closing lines of the song: 'Farewell my friend'. While one reading suggests that it is the bad character trait (i.e. an inclination to prostitute oneself for power and material wealth) to which Uyghurs must say goodbye, a darker interpretation implies that it is Uyghur officials and social climbers – the 'immortal

friends' – who must bid farewell to their lives. As one respondent put it, the song's closing line then assumes the meaning: 'You die!' [*Ölisän!*].

The flawed national character

The self-perception among many Uyghurs that they suffer from a flawed national character is developed in more depth in the final song, 'Häsrät' [Sadness]:

'Häsrät'	**'Sadness'**
Bir anidin tuğulğan	Born of one mother
Qerindaštuq äsli biz	Once compatriots we
Qoydi bizni šu küngä	What's brought us to this day?
Osal päyli xuymiz	Our bad character trait
Miwä bärgän däräxni	Trees which bear fruit
Qurutmaqni oylaymiz	We leave to bleed dry
Kim qazansa nätijä	As we snap and gnaw
Šuni qišläp ğajaymiz	At each others' success
Dağdam yolğa patmaymiz	No room for us to tread one wide road
Tar kočidin qatraymiz	We hurry down our narrow lanes
Qiltaq qurup öz ara	Building traps for one another
Yeqitmaqni oylaymiz.	To cause each other's fall.

According to respondents, this song is the most emotive of the four. In the words of Šatgül, a middle-aged Uyghur woman in the service industry: 'When we hear Alim's songs, it does something to us… It gets us right in the chest [places hands on heart], makes us feel really agonized'. When I asked her whether this was a good or bad pain, she confirmed that it was a good sort of pain, suggesting that her experience of the song involved a strong element of catharsis. The sadness in 'Häsrät' derives from its preoccupation with notions of Uyghur national disunity (the narrow lanes as opposed to the wide road) and its perceived source: infighting and envy. This is a perception common among educated Uyghurs. For instance, two university graduates living in Ürümchi, Aliyä and Äziz, described the difference between Uyghurs and Qazaqs thus: 'The Qazaqs are a much better people than us… They are not jealous of one another. They fight big wars, we fight small ones'. They further cited a Uyghur saying: 'Paltining sepi yağač tur' [The axe-handle is ever made of wood], in which the axe blade symbolizes the Han hegemony, aided by the Uyghurs (the axe-handle) in its oppression of the Uyghur people (the wood).

In a 1996 interview, Dilšat told me that some Uyghurs were supplying information to the Chinese authorities in the hope of bettering their personal circumstances: 'People are really scared in Qäšqär. And what they're most scared of is other Uyghurs… spies'. These fears had multiplied by the time of my return to Xinjiang in 2002. Some said that the arrest of Räbiyä Qadir (popularly known as 'Xinjiang's millionaire businesswoman') in 1998 had been made on the basis of information leaked to the Chinese authorities by precisely such 'inside' spies. They deemed such behaviour widespread and attributed it to petty jealousy and a reluctance to see others achieve. Compare this view with the image in lines 7-8 of 'Häsrät', when once again the dog metaphor is evoked. This time we find the dogs fighting over the

spoils. Hence Uyghurs listening to 'Häsrät' experience feelings of regret combined with emotional release or catharsis, in recognition of a painfully familiar social phenomenon.

Differing views towards secession

The Uyghurs were undoubtedly more united as a nation (in the sense of being generally opposed to the Han presence) in the mid-1990s than at any other time previously, due to the domestic and international factors mentioned above.[42] However, there remained difficulties concerning ethno-political mobilization. Groups (and I present these as 'ideal types') that fully subscribed to separatist, ethno-political ideologies included young male intellectuals, young male petty entrepreneurs, and the unemployed, all hailing from urban settings. Groups who did not necessarily subscribe to such ideologies included the older generation, women, and Uyghur peasants. In particular, views on secession – and the way to go about achieving this – differed significantly across generations, between rural and urban areas, and between genders. As Naby had predicted a decade earlier, the attitudes of the young generation had become far more radicalized (1986: 245). The elders, however, were not given to impetuous acts, while both they and the middle-aged bore the scars of their persecution during the Cultural Revolution. Many women remarked to me that the Chinese state 'would never let go of Xinjiang', and preferred to focus on gaining equal rights and opportunities for Uyghurs within the current socio-political structure. Uyghur peasants had not at that time experienced competition from Han immigrants for education, work, and resources on the scale experienced by urban Uyghurs, and so their grievances were fewer. Most protested about two issues in particular: the imposition by local cadres of adverse, over-centralized farming policies, and the

vastly unpopular Han-enforced birth control policy. Few, it seemed, had begun to look beyond their immediate, everyday circumstances to consider the future of the Uyghur nation.

I would suggest, however, that the dissemination of nationalist discourse through the medium of popular song, together with negative oral stereotyping of the Han in the cities (and its eventual oral transmission to rural areas) played a significant role in the subsequent spread of separatist ideology to the countryside and to other social groups. While this is evidently difficult to measure, the year 1997 saw an increase in separatist violence such as bombings, armed attacks on Han Chinese police, mob attacks directed at Han police, military and civilians, and riots, including the largest in Xinjiang since 1949. On 5-6 February, young Uyghurs in the northern town of Ghulja attacked Han Chinese civilians indiscriminately on the streets, and burned the bodies of the dead. The riot was said to have been sparked by the execution of thirty young Uyghur separatists, the arrest of one hundred Muslim students with pro-independence views and state suppression of so-called 'illegal religious activities'. These developments resulted in an intensified government crackdown in the political and religious spheres, and, eventually, the cultural sphere.[43] Reports released by Amnesty International in January/April 1999 showed that Uyghurs recently detained on suspicion of 'ethnic splittism' [*fenliezhuyi* or 'attempting to split the motherland'] included secondary school teachers, peasants, merchants, a surgeon, a factory worker, 'millionaire businesswoman' Räbiyä Qadir, and even a local Uyghur cadre (Amnesty International, 1999a, b).

Raising awareness: Alim, the gatekeeper

Confucius once said: 'In altering customs and changing habits, nothing is better than music'.[44] Like its historical predecessors, the modern Chinese state has made concerted efforts to commodify and disarm oppositional art (in the sense posited by the Frankfurt theorists of popular culture). In the mid-1990s, however, Uyghur artists began to resist these efforts, using new folk as a means to construct and disseminate representations of the Uyghur nation that contrasted sharply with the carefully packaged, exoticized images of 'happy', colourful, *passive* ethnic minorities produced by the Han regime (Gladney, 1994). These alternative representations, while not necessarily painting a nuanced picture of complex social conditions in the region, proved powerful reflections of popular socio-political perceptions and frustrations. They thus created an emotional resonance, derived from a sense of 'mutual validation', among Uyghurs of all walks of life. As Harris put it: 'The sense of the Uyghur community is being effectively redrawn through popular music' (2002: 280). Through the repetitive processes of performing, listening to (and unconsciously *hearing*) Alim's songs, the meanings, perceptions, and assumptions contained therein were reproduced throughout urban society, and came to influence attitudes among a growing number of individuals in the countryside.[45] Alim's lamentations may therefore be said to possess an illuminative quality in the modern context, creating awareness of the need for ethnic unity in relation to the perceived religio-cultural and socio-economic threat posed by the Han. This role of 'illuminist' is explored in 'Därwaziwän' [The Gatekeeper], a fifth song taken from the cassette *Qaldi Iz*: 'There was a time when we lost everything to thieves; From now on, I shall be vigilant, for I am the gatekeeper'. Once more, the Han Chinese are portrayed as colonizer, this time as 'thieves' who have stolen the beautiful land of Xinjiang along with its natural

resources. Meanwhile, Alim sings in the first person, apparently presenting himself as his people's lonely saviour.

Conclusion: Popular music, politics, and playing the game

The events of the latter half of the decade show that, when taken too far by persons of a particular disposition, exhortations to ethnic loyalty can lead to violence both within and between ethnic groups, that songs of nationalism may – as in the former Yugoslavia – 'reaffirm hatreds between different peoples' (Hudson, 2000: 168). It could for instance be argued that one extreme consequence of Alim's songs against so-called 'collaborators' (and perhaps one unforeseen by the singer himself) was to catalyse an increase in the number of assassinations and attempted assassinations on Uyghur cadres and personnel in the mid-late 1990s. In other words, such events not only inspired Alim's songs, but may also have been *inspired by them*. This in turn begs the question: why have the Chinese authorities seemingly been so slow and unsystematic in their sanctioning of Uyghur songs of nationalism? To date, the only song to be censored on Alim's cassette *Qaldi Iz* was the title track [Traces]. This is a comparatively gentle song and arguably less likely to provoke ethnic tension than some others analysed here. Certainly, the language barrier created by publishing lyrics in Uyghur, added to the difficulties of interpreting meanings veiled in metaphor and allusion, may have partially hindered the monitoring process. *Qaldi Iz*, based as it is on a pre-existing nationalist poem known to the Han authorities, would come under suspicion much more rapidly than the original texts, and this is one possible explanation why this song was censored where others were not. However, it is my contention that just as colonial situations throughout history have produced individuals willing to cooperate with the colonizer, Uyghur nationalist song lyrics,

along with other literary forms, will eventually be translated and made available to the Chinese state. Consider, for example, the fact that the nationalist poem, recited at a public gathering to celebrate Nawruz (Uyghur New Year) in Ürümchi in March 2002, was translated and passed to the authorities within just twenty-four hours, resulting in the arrest of the speaker. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to assume that if uneducated Uyghur peasants are able to receive and understand the hidden messages in Alim's songs, educated Han officials, trained to identify political references in minority texts, might also be capable of the same.

One might suggest (though it is pure speculation) that, in this case, the Cultural Bureau weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of giving airplay to songs that highlight disunity among the Uyghurs and decided that it was in the interests of the state to let them circulate. After all, Alim's mix of lamentation of disunity and exhortation to unity will affect different individuals in different ways. There remains a strong likelihood that some Uyghurs, far from reacting positively and vowing to build unity among their people, may instead end up internalizing negative perceptions such as that of the 'bad character trait,' resulting in low ethnic self-esteem and gradual loss of hope. Conversely, if the authorities were to ban the entire cassette or arrest its author, Alim would be heralded as an ethnic hero and martyr and the opposite effect would be produced, that of encouraging and fuelling ethnic pride and resistance.

Epilogue

By 2002, the environment surrounding music and politics in Xinjiang had significantly changed and public opinion regarding Ömärjan Alim was split. Some of those interviewed remained loyal to the singer, and continued to laud him as the

'voice of the Uyghurs'. They circulated rumours of his arrest and censorship, and claimed with evident pride that he had been warned by the government not to sing 'songs that threaten the unity of the nationalities' [*minzu tuanjie*]. Others, however, deemed him a hypocrite, claiming that he has 'sold out' in recent years. The example given most frequently was the story of Alim reputedly opening a dance hall in his northern hometown of Ghulja, to which Uyghur girls came to drink, take drugs, and socialize with men. This act was perceived to contravene Alim's popular didactic piece, 'Aldanma, singlim' [Don't be taken in, sister]. In an interview in 2002, close relatives of the artist claimed that Alim had never been in trouble with the state, insisting that he was 'unaware of the content of his songs' since they were *written for him* by local poets and writers and he himself was 'entirely uneducated'. Clearly the family's standard line of defence, this argument has apparently been – successfully – used to defend Alim against charges of 'ethnic splittism' in court.[46] Alim's double release in 2002, *Häsät Qilma* [Don't fall prey to envy], appears to contain no comparably explicit reference to Uyghur/Han relations, concentrating generally on intra-ethnic social themes. Such a shift would certainly suffice to cause ardent Uyghur nationalists to deem him a sell-out, and may be precisely the result the Chinese authorities had hoped for. Permitting (or perhaps even encouraging?) Alim to continue in a diluted or castrated form allows the state to orchestrate his public fall from nationalist glory and further promote the sense of hopelessness already taking root among the Uyghur people.

In the wake of the new cultural crackdown, triggered by the aforementioned public recital of a nationalist poem in March 2002 and encouraged by partial US endorsement of China's 'anti-terrorist' campaign, Xinjiang's new folk singers have been forced to search for alternative ways to voice popular discontent. In some cases

(and possibly Alim's), this means stepping aside to allow as yet unknown and undetected champions of the cause to emerge, for example, Tašmämät Batur, the new name on many lips. For Alim's closest competitor, Abdurehim Heyit, it has meant resorting to the power of music itself. The title track of his new release, *Ömüt* [Hope], is a powerful instrumental, conveying passion, desperation, and determination. In it, the *dutar* may be said to become a 'political instrument… giving voice to the collective feelings of the group' (Cooke and Doornbas, 1982: 53). Friends of the singer told me that it was now simply too dangerous to use nationalist lyrics, adding that it would be 'a mistake to connect Heyit with Ömärjan Alim in any way'.

During the current period of maximum state control over the political, religious and cultural spheres in Xinjiang, we might expect to see Uyghurs develop new, symbolic means of expressing dissatisfaction with their situation. Indeed, symbolic acts of dissidence are already emerging in the sphereof religion. While numbers of Uyghurs entering the mosques in the regional capital Ürümchi were small in the mid-1990s, those same mosques have been pulled down and replaced by new ones twice their original size in 2001-2002. Like Heyit's instrumental response to increased controls on culture, some respondents indicated that the mass return to the mosque represents a symbolic act of resistance to the increased repression of religion since the mid-1990s. The Chinese state may be able to co-opt Uyghur imams or simply replace them with state-trained counterparts, but it remains to be seen whether it can replace Allah or the unifying force of Islam itself. Meanwhile, Heyit's response to the question of whether hope endures in Xinjiang suggests that the new 'silence' is temporary: 'Where there's life, there's hope' [Hayat bar bolsa, ömüt bar].

APPENDIX: List of respondents

Key informants

Abdurehim Heyit: Summer 1996, Qäšqär, South Xinjiang and August-September 2002, Ürümchi city, North Xinjiang.

Notes: new folk singer, one of two artists popularly characterized as the 'voice of the Uyghurs,' born in Qäšqär, performed with the Central Minorities Song and Dance Troupe in Beijing for two decades, now affiliated to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Song and Dance Troupe in Ürümchi city, practising Muslim, early forties, male.

Aliyä: throughout 1995-6, Ürümchi city, North Xinjiang and Kucha, South Xinjiang; August-September 2002, Ürümchi city.

Notes: former postgraduate student, works in social sector, based in Ürümchi city, early-late twenties, female.

Äziz: throughout 1995-6, Ürümchi city, North Xinjiang and Kucha, South Xinjiang; August-September 2002, Ürümchi city.

Notes: university graduate, teacher, based in Ürümchi city, early-late twenties, male.

Dilšat: Summer 1996, Qäšqär, South Xinjiang.

Notes: university graduate, works in tourist industry, based in Qäšqär, early twenties, male.

Räwiä: throughout 1995-6 and September 2002, Ürümchi city, North Xinjiang.

Notes: *minkaohan* (educated in Chinese rather than mother tongue), university graduate, employed in state work unit, based in Ürümchi city, late thirties-early forties, female.

Šatgül: August-September 2002, Ürümchi city.

Notes: secondary education only, works in tertiary industry, based in Ürümchi city, mid-late forties, female.

Šöhrat: throughout 1995-6, Ürümchi city, North Xinjiang; June 2002, Europe.

Notes: university graduate, intellectual, based in Ürümchi city, late twenties-early thirties, male.

Tursun: Summer 1996, Aqsu, South Xinjiang.

Notes: peasant and father of three, living with family in small rural community in Aqsu, semi-literate, early thirties, male.

Occasional informants

Batur: April 1996, Ürümchi city, North Xinjiang.

Notes: secondary education only, migrant worker, based in Ürümchi city, mid-thirties, male.

Karim: Summer 1996, Xotän, South Xinjiang.

Notes: health professional, based in Xotän, practising Muslim, mid-fifties, male.

Relatives of Ömärjan Alim (new folk singer and the second of two artists popularly characterized as the 'voice of the Uyghurs'): September 2002, Ghulja, North Xinjiang.

Notes: all based in Ghulja, all female and representing all generations.

Author's note: In order to protect the anonymity of informants, all names have been altered, birthplaces are omitted, and only broad descriptions of profession are given.

Discography

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Heyit, Abdurehim. *Mung-zar* [Sadness]. Parts 1, 2, and 3. (Ši'än: Ši'än kino studiyasi un-sin näšriyati, CN-H02-94-316-00/A, 1994).

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Ge'er, Teng, 'The Land of the Blue Wolf', *Meng Sui Feng Piao* [Dreams Float with the Wind](Baidai (EMI) / Zhonghua wenyi yinxiang lianhe chubanshe, CN-A49-94-348-00/A, 1994).

Ge'er, Teng, 'The Mongol', *Teng Ge'er: Hei Junma* [Teng Ge'er: Black Steed] (Xueyuan yinxiang chubanshe CN-A56-96-0001-0/A, 1996).

Notes

[1] This chapter develops themes that appeared briefly in my thesis (Smith, 1999) and combines interview data and media analyses from it with new song translations and new interviews conducted in 2002. I am indebted to the Economic and Social Research Council for supporting initial fieldwork in 1995-96. Also, I would like to extend my thanks to co-panellists and members of the audience for their useful suggestions and comments at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies in New York, 2003.

[2] See Hoppe (1992) for an ethnic breakdown of Xinjiang's population.

[3] Gardner Bovingdon (2003) is currently engaged in fascinating research on the ways in which contemporary Uyghurs preserve and disseminate an alternative (and sometimes fanciful) vision of a distinct national past through the medium of oral histories.

[4] For a detailed analysis of ethnic boundary maintenance in two towns in Xinjiang in the mid-1990s, see Smith (2002) and Bellér-Hann (2002). I refer to the Han Chinese as 'The Han' or 'The Han Chinese' throughout this chapter in recognition of the tendency of many Uyghurs in 1995-1996 to portray the Han as an immoveable, uniform 'Other' in everyday popular discourse. This in no way suggests that all Han settlers in Xinjiang are 'the same', simply that Uyghur perceptions were often voiced in uncompromising terms. Nor does my use of this blanket term suggest that all Uyghur views on the Han are identical. In fact, Uyghurs from different age groups hold nuanced views with regard to Han immigrants with older Uyghurs distinguishing between first-generation Han settlers who were willing to respect local culture and newly arrived immigrants who are not (Smith 2000).

[5] I employ the term 'collaborator' throughout, although the closest equivalent to the original Uyghur term [*maqulči* or 'person who says "OK"'] would be 'Yes-man'. Despite common Uyghur perceptions of their indigenous leaders, it is of course impossible to categorize all Uyghur officials in black and white terms as either a 'man of the people' or a 'collaborator'. Interviews carried out in 1996 suggested rather that individuals occupied different points on a scale between altruism and self-interest, and that these positions were far from static. See also Stan Toops' illuminating comparison of two recent Uyghur leaders, Tömür Dawamat and Ismail Amat, in which the former is characterized rather as a 'cipher' for state-generated rhetoric, while the latter is shown to pursue a viable political agenda that reflects the realities of the region (1992).

[6] I borrow this term from the Albanian *iluminist*, connoting a poet who gives his life to spreading a message of self-elevation to his fellow countrymen (Sugarman, 1999: 447).

[7] These days, Qarašar forms part of the Bayingholin Mongol autonomous prefecture. While Uyghurs prefer the historical name, the Chinese have renamed the area Yanji Hui Autonomous County [*Yanji huizu zizhixian*].

[8] For writings on the Yaqub Beg rebellion (1866-1877), see Kim (1986) and Tsing (1961); on the Turkish-Islamic Republic of Eastern Turkestan (1933-1934), see Forbes (1986); and on the East Turkestan Republic (1944-1949), see Forbes (1986) and Benson (1990).

[9] In my writings on Uyghur identity, I start from the assumption that human identities are relative and conjunctural, in other words that they are formed in relation to an 'Other,' and are fluid and changing, formed at particular moments in time in response to a specific set of social, economic, and/or political circumstances (Clifford, 1988:

10-11; Gladney, 1996). For a discussion of the relative and fluid nature of ethnic boundaries, see Barth (1969) and Eriksen (1993: 10–12).

[10] The Salars are said to have originated from a Turkmen tribe (Schwarz, 1984: 39-40), and therefore might be said to have their own country in Turkmenistan. The Tatars and the Salars in Xinjiang numbered only 4,821 and 3,660 persons respectively in 1990, compared with a Uyghur population of 7,194,675 (Hoppe, 1992: 360).

[11] Prior to the Chinese Communists taking power in 1949, Western travellers identified the region as 'East Turkestan,' reflecting the dominant presence of Turkic groups. The words 'East Turkestan' also appeared in the names of the independent regimes of the 1930s and 40s, and continue to be favoured by some contemporary separatist movements.

[12] Tuohy shows how the Chinese state has used popular music and song variously as a means to assess the attitudes of the empire's subjects, mobilize the nation against foreign invaders, and represent the nation in a way that stresses ethnic inclusiveness (2001: 110-118). See also Perris (1985: 93-122).

[13] This term was coined by Harris in her survey of the popular music industry in Xinjiang (2002: 272).

[14] Baranovitch (2001) focuses on the increasing degree of agency displayed by minority artists in China in the creation of alternative representations of their ethnic identity. Among his 'new voices' is Inner Mongolian singer Teng Ge'er.

[15] For details of Kösän's experiences, see Harris (2002: 265-66).

[16] Heyit's 1994 trilogy, *Mung-zar* [Sadness], was released through a studio in Xi'an, Sha'anxi province, far to the east of Xinjiang.

[17] For a full translation in English, see Smith (1999: 176-77).

[18] These days, women can take part equally with men in a non-religious form of *mäšräp*, intended to allow people to rejoice through the medium of the performing arts (Mackerras, 1985: 68). Up until the 1950s, however, participants were all male. The *mäšräp* functioned as a rite of passage into manhood, a vehicle for regulating moral, religious, and social etiquette, and a means of forming male peer groups. In the mid-late 1990s, this 'traditional' form of *mäšräp* was resurrected in the city of Ghulja, North Xinjiang, and among Uyghur communities in Almaty, Qazaqstan with the modern aim of creating and maintaining Uyghur national culture (Roberts, 1998: 675). Such *mäšräp* quickly came under government suspicion in the People's Republic as popular arenas for the dissemination of separatist ideologies and literatures.

[19] Mackerras remarks that the spoken play [*huaju*] popular among Han Chinese has singularly failed to make an impression among the Uyghur because it lacks music, the ingredient so essential to their cultural identity (1985: 66).

[20] Ötkür's novels were fictional accounts of events that occurred before the Chinese Communists came to power in 1949. In them, he expressed themes and ideas relevant to the present, escaping the censor by dressing these in analogous historical situations (Rudelson, 1997: 163-65).

[21] See Bellér-Hann on the history of script changes in Xinjiang (1991: 72-5).

[22] See, for example, 'Čillang Xoruzum' [Crow, My Rooster!] by Abdurehim Heyit, from the tape *Mung-zar* [Sadness]. Harris gives examples in Ömärjan Alim's work (2002: 278). There is an interesting comparison here with the Albanian nationalist movement during the period from the start of the Albanian War of Independence in 1898 through the declaration of an independent Albania in 1912 to its recognition by the Great Powers in 1918. Sugarman writes that villagers gained a 'deep-seated sense of themselves as being Albanian' only after nationalist poems were transformed into

men's narrative songs (1999: 441-45). In this process, figures such as *çetë* [armed guerrilla unit] commander Sali Butka composed revolutionary poems that fused features of village song texts with nationalist themes in a form of folk poetry. She hypothesizes that *cetë* members, who were encouraged to become literate, began to sing the poems as songs, and that these were then taken up by fellow villagers when members returned home.

[23] In presenting this phenomenon as a two-way process, I follow Tuohy, who models musical nationalism in China as a 'mutually transformative process of making music national and of realizing the nation musically' (2001: 108-9) and Sugarman, who sees Albanian literary figures as simultaneously producing the nationalist discourses of the Albanian Rilindja ('rebirth') and being produced as national subjects by them (1999: 421).

[24] Harris notes that Xinjiang's bazaars function as an 'unofficial pop chart', where the number of shops and restaurants playing a certain cassette provide a reliable guide to the latest hit (2002: 270). See also Baranovitch who writes that Teng Ge'er's 1989 release 'The Mongol' was still frequently sung in rural areas of Inner Mongolia in the mid-1990s, 'suggesting that his alternative [ethnic] representation is accepted by a large portion of the people he claims to represent'(2001: 371).

[25] An exception might be 'Wäsiyät' [Testament], which tackles the social problem of drug abuse and addiction among young Uyghurs, although many Uyghurs relate even this problem to their sense of political impotence, or to the unequal life chances afforded them under the Han hegemony. For an English translation of the poem 'Iz' [Traces], see Allworth and Pahta (1988). The song was subsequently banned from radio airplay and public performance.

[26] Inner Mongolian singer Teng Ge'er similarly sang in 1994 of aggressive Han colonization and ecological destruction in his homeland in *The Land of the Blue Wolf*. Baranovitch describes the song as 'simultaneously a tragic elegy, a cry of protest, and an effort to raise the consciousness of other Mongols' (2001: 369).

[27] This song alludes to a tiny minority of young Uyghur women in Ürümchi who are said to have adopted 'bad modern ways' (where modernity is perceived to have been introduced by the Han and as running counter to Islamic social mores). These girls adopt a role comparable to that of the Japanese 'hostess', drinking, dancing, and, in rare cases, sleeping with Han businessmen for money.

[28] A full list of respondents is available for reference in the appendix.

[29] In recognition of the fact that 'content analysts are not innocent readers' (Frith, cited in Shepherd, 1999: 172) and in order to achieve inter-subjectivity, all song translations and their interpretations were prepared by the author in consultation with Uyghur respondents in Europe and Xinjiang during the summer of 2002. For respondents' invaluable help, I extend my sincere gratitude. Elegance in the target language is partly sacrificed in favour of retaining as far as possible the original vocabulary, metaphors, and cultural concepts in the source text.

[30] See also Bovingdon's account of a lively exchange between two women – one Uyghur and one Han – on the question of indigeneity to the region (2002: 49-52).

[31] I deal with Uyghur perceptions of socio-economic inequalities in depth elsewhere (Smith, 1999: 242-68).

[32] See Cloonan and Garofalo (2003) on the social and political aspects of popular music and censorship.

[33] Uyghur leaders are hand picked by the Chinese government according to the appropriateness of their political attitudes. They must normally complete five years of

political education at the Central University for Nationalities (formerly the Central Institute for Nationalities) in Beijing before assuming their posts. Mackerras observed that 'no Uyghur could rise to real power who espoused local nationalism', and this remains the case today (1985: 77).

[34] According to Ämät's annotation, the proverb implies that a man who thinks of his people and native place is pure while one who thinks only of the road to riches is selfish (2001: 399).

[35] In her work on Albanian nationalism, Sugarman hypothesizes that patriotic slogans such as 'Albania hates a traitor' appearing in songs included in nationalist intellectual Mitko's 1878 collection of folk songs had probably been added long after the songs' creation, in an attempt to awaken and unite the Albanian people (1999: 425).

[36] See Alim's song 'Mehman Bašlidim' [I brought home a guest).

[37] Compare the term *zougou* [literally 'running dog' or stooge] in Chinese, used to describe Chinese who collaborated with Western or Japanese imperialists. *Zougou* translates into Uyghur as *yalaqči* [literally 'person who licks'].

[38] Compare Uyghur rock singer Abdulla's song 'Šükür' [Thanks], which deals with Uyghur passivity (Harris 2002: 276-77; Harris gives no discographic details as this was a live performance).

[39] See Smith for a catalogue of ethnic disturbances in Xinjiang 1949-1997 (1999: Appendix I).

[40] Compare shifting boundaries in South Africa with regard to 'internal' and 'external' Others. In the 1970s, Inkatha encouraged their members to defend the Zulu kingdom against 'outsiders' (at that time the government, whites, Indians, and Xhosas). Yet in the 1980s, Zulus opposed to the Zulu kingdom were targeted as 'the enemy within'

(Morris Szeftel, African Studies Seminar, Department of Politics, University of Leeds, 7/12/94).

[41] *Lien ho pao*, Hong Kong, 27 February 1995 in Summary of World Broadcasts (Asia Pacific), 1 March 1995, FE/2240 G/4.

[42] See Bovingdon (2002) for an engaging account of means of everyday resistance among ordinary Uyghurs in the latter half of the 1990s, and Smith (2000) for an analysis of the emergence of ethno-political ideologies among Uyghur youth.

[43] For information about the repressive measures adopted by the Chinese state since 1995 and in the post-September 11 period, see Kellner (2002: 16-27), Amnesty International (1997; 1998; 1999a, b; 2002), and Human Rights Watch (2001).

[44] Confucius, quoted by Kong Yingda, *Liji zhengyi* (cited in Tuohy 2001: 107).

[45] The Chinese state has deliberately employed musical repetition in its goal to create a 'voice of the people', through daily broadcasts on television, radio, and even public loudspeakers (Tuohy 2001: 117; 123). Alim's messages have been popularized on one level through a similar process of repetition, with Uyghur customers 'accidentally' hearing his songs as they browse the bazaar. I was fascinated during a stay in Kucha in 1996 to find a microcosm of competing musical nationalisms, with state-sanctioned, co-opted minority music blaring out of public loudspeakers in the predominantly Han-settled New Town, as independently-produced Uyghur pop musics blared from cassette kiosks in the predominantly Uyghur-settled Old Town.

[46] Personal communication with Rachel Harris, November 2002.